

*Introduce Bill to Strengthen Family Violence Option*

(Washington, DC)— U.S. Representatives Gwen Moore (D-Milwaukee), Vice Chair of the Congressional Women’s Caucus, and Pete Stark (D-CA), Senior Member of the House Ways and Means Income Security and Family Support Subcommittee, today introduced legislation that would guarantee protections under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program for victims of domestic violence.

TANF, the nation's income support program for poor families, expires this year, and Congress is working on legislation to reauthorize and update the program.

Congresswoman Moore said, **“Women aren’t getting the help they need and are being forced back into abusive environments. By setting standards and strengthening enforcement, we will help ensure that any woman – no matter her place in life – can escape abuse.”**

Congressman Stark said, **“The TANF program needs to be fixed. Many of our most vulnerable neighbors, especially victims of domestic violence and their children, are not being helped by the program. This bill guarantees help for victims of domestic violence, and is a good step to take as we consider broader reforms of the program.”**

The Family Violence Option (FVO) in TANF is designed to help women escape domestic violence by offering exemptions to specific TANF requirements that can adversely affect victims and their children. Under current law, states can choose whether or not to offer benefits under the FVO. This bill would prevent states from leaving the program, and establish and enforce standards so that victims are properly screened and referred to crucial services.

The bill streamlines the application process making it easier and faster for women to get help and requires that women promptly be informed of eligibility requirements.

Additionally, the measure expands eligibility for services by offering similar help to victims of sexual violence. These victims would now be eligible for counseling and support services including, support groups, legal and court advocacy, and shelter placement.

Finally, the bill also requires the Department of Health and Human Services to study state efforts and report back to Congress on what is working and what is not. This information will help identify holes in the safety net and provide better services to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

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For an interview with Congresswoman Gwen Moore, please contact David Frey at 202-225-4572.